60p

THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

116

Mystery Earth lights
Hurtling towards the end
Cottingley revelations
Lion hunts in Britain
Psi in vogue

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THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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Faults, flaws and flare-ups

Scientists now recognise the fact that certain volcanic upheavals can produce spectacular light displays. PAUL DEVEREUX examines this remarkable phenomenon – and suggests that it could be connected with the origin of UFOs

A CHINESE MOUNTAIN called Wu T'ai Shan may hold a clue to the origin of UFOs. On its southern peak is a tower designed to give a view of a remarkable phenomenon that, in China's Buddhist days, was considered to be a manifestation of the Buddha. Probably the last European to witness it, some time in the 1930s, was John Blofeld. He and his companions were waiting in the tower when a monk entered their room after midnight exclaiming: 'The Bodhisattva has appeared!' Blofeld was led to the tower's window – and gasped with surprise at what he saw. 'There, in the great open space beyond the window,' Blofeld wrote, 'innumerable balls of fire floated majestically past . . . .' These lights evidently appeared with sufficient regularity to have persuaded the monks to build their observation tower; and the monks linked the mountain itself with their occurrence.

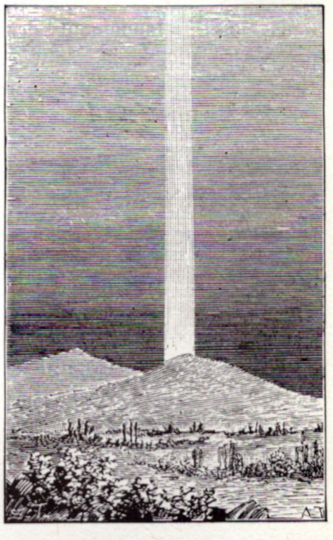
It is probable that these 'balls of fire' are in fact related to 'mountain peak discharges' – curious beams of light that are seen from time to time radiating from the tops of high mountains. They have been noticed particularly in the Andes in South America. These luminous effects are sometimes visible over huge distances. In the Chilean Andes mountain peak discharges are usually seen from late spring to early autumn. A constant glow around a mountain can give way to occasional outbursts that look like great searchlight beams. Such displays have been reported when the sky is clear and seem particularly closely associated with earthquakes. In August 1906, for example, at the time of a great earthquake in Chile, mountain peak discharges were so brilliant that, as one witness put it, 'the whole sky seemed to be on fire.'

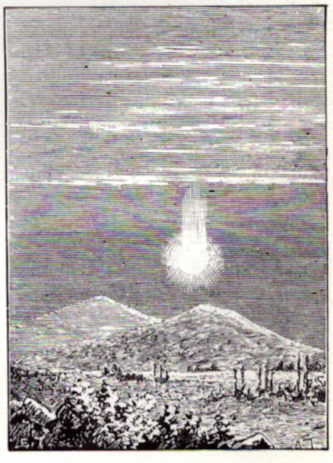
This link with earthquakes is interesting because there are other, though doubtlessly closely related, types of lights that have been noted specifically in relation to seismic activity – the so-called 'earthquake lights' (see page 1608). These take many forms. Just before the strong 1957 earth tremor centred on Charnwood Forest, Leicestershire, England, dozens of people reported 'tadpole-shaped' lights flying through the sky, while in an earthquake that shook Humboldt County in California, USA, in 1932, the lights appeared like 'bolts of lightning travelling from the ground towards the sky'. During another Californian earthquake, near Hollister in 1961, sequential flashes of light were seen being emitted from random places on local hillsides. Later inspection of the locations failed to reveal an obvious explanation for the lights.

Japan is prone to earthquakes, and it is in that country that seismic light phenomena have been most closely studied to date. A researcher named Musya collected no less than 1500 eyewitness reports from a single earthquake that occurred on the Idu Peninsula on 26 November 1930. Various forms of lights were reported – flares like sheet lightning but of longer duration, auroral streamers emanating from a point on the

A rare photograph of earthquake lights at Matsushiro, Japan, taken during a local 'swarm' of seismic tremors that took place between 1965 and 1967. There have been frequent and reliable reports of the phenomenon for hundreds of years – but scientists have only recently acknowledged its existence

Left: an illustration from *Earthquakes*, by Arnold Boscowitz, published in 1898: 'The sky streaked with lightning flashes and meteors. The inhabitants regard them with terror, as presages of an earthquake.' Another probable example of what has since become known as 'earthquake lights' occurred at Logelbach in Alsace, in France, in March 1878 (below). The phenomenon finally received the blessing of orthodox science in 1981, when Dr Brian Brady of the US Bureau of Mines at Denver, Colorado, succeeded in reproducing in the laboratory and photographing 'earthquake' lights that appeared as a result of applying huge pressures to a piece of granite (right). Megaliths are huge lumps of stone: could it be that they, too, emit light when subjected to large pressures by natural forces?





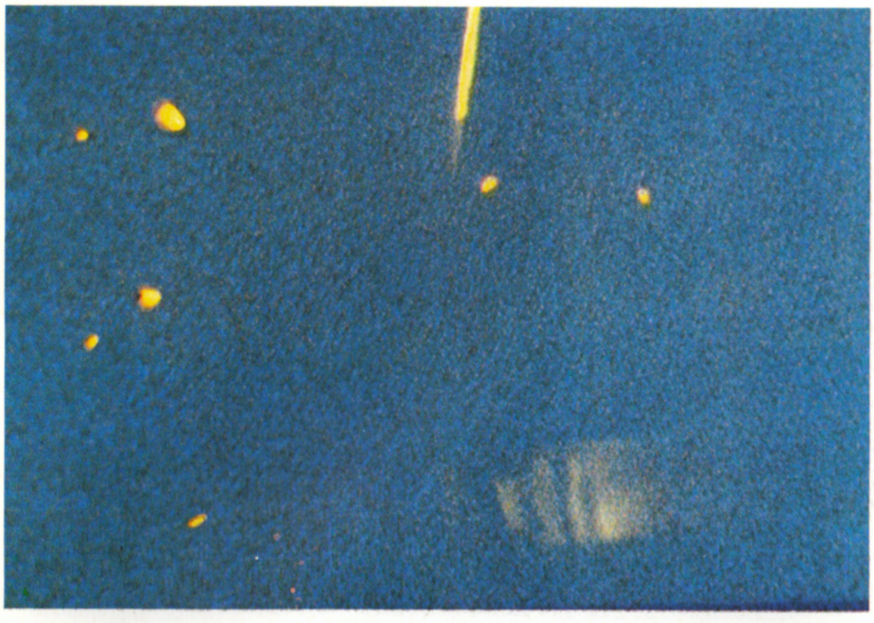
horizon, and beams and columns of light at other locations in the vicinity of the quake. Fireballs and straight rows of round masses of light were also observed. The brilliance of some of the lights was such that they cast illumination as strong as moonlight as far as 30 miles (50 kilometres) away. But the most important data on such phenomena have come from another researcher, Yasui, who was able to obtain photographs of atmospheric illuminations associated with the swarm of tremors around Matsushiro between 1965 and 1967.

So it is clear that the geology of our planet can produce extraordinary luminous atmospheric manifestations, even though the mechanisms by which they are created are far from understood by scientists. In their 1977 book *Space-time transients* Michael A. Persinger and Ghislaine F. Lafrenière suggested that UFO events were, in fact, geologically produced lightforms; that in areas subject to low intensity tremors as well as full-blown earthquakes piezoelectricity – or 'seismoelectricity' – created ionisation effects in the atmosphere close to geological fault lines (see page 1608). Their research in North America led them to conclude that 'the data consistently point towards seismic-related sources' for UFOs. The researchers further suggested that the geophysical conditions producing such light phenomena, and possibly surrounding such phenomena themselves, could have an effect on human brain rhythms, triggering hallucinatory imagery within the consciousness of witnesses (see page 1675).

Years before these suggestions were made, however, certain ufologists had already noticed an apparent correlation between UFO incidence and fault lines. The French researcher F. Lagarde, for instance, made a study of sightings in the 1954 French UFO wave and concluded: 'UFO sightings occur by preference on geological faults.' Spanish researchers Lopez and Ares similarly noted in their study of the Spanish UFO flap that took place in 1968 and 1969 that a large percentage of UFOs were sighted on or near fault lines. In the late 1960s the Pereiro region of Brazil experienced a plague of UFOs. Tremendous detonations were heard and 'immense' blue-green fiery balls were seen 'flying in all directions overhead'. Conical forms also appeared, and some of the UFOs seemed to direct 'lights like searchlights' onto the ground. Concurrent with these manifestations the region was undergoing almost daily earth tremors. Observers noted that the lights always preceded the tremors by a few hours: 'the balls of light seem to know where and when the 'quakes are coming.'

A history of strangeness

During the period from 1972 to 1976 a wide-ranging study of the central English county of Leicestershire was conducted, in which local researcher Andrew York and the author took part. A thorough archival and field study was made of ancient sites and traditions, seismic and meteorological phenomena as well as alleged UFO events. English counties are particularly suitable for such research, as each has central archives, county research groups, at least one local newspaper and forms a practicable ground area for fieldwork. This particular study located hitherto unknown standing stones and revealed that the county has a rich history of seismic disturbance, with records going back to the 16th century. The study also found accounts stretching back for centuries detailing remarkable atmospheric events in Leicestershire. A typical incident occurred in 1659 in the village of Markfield ('the mark on the field' – named after a standing stone) on Charnwood Forest, a rugged waste of exposed strata of ancient rocks with its own geological fault system, in the north-west

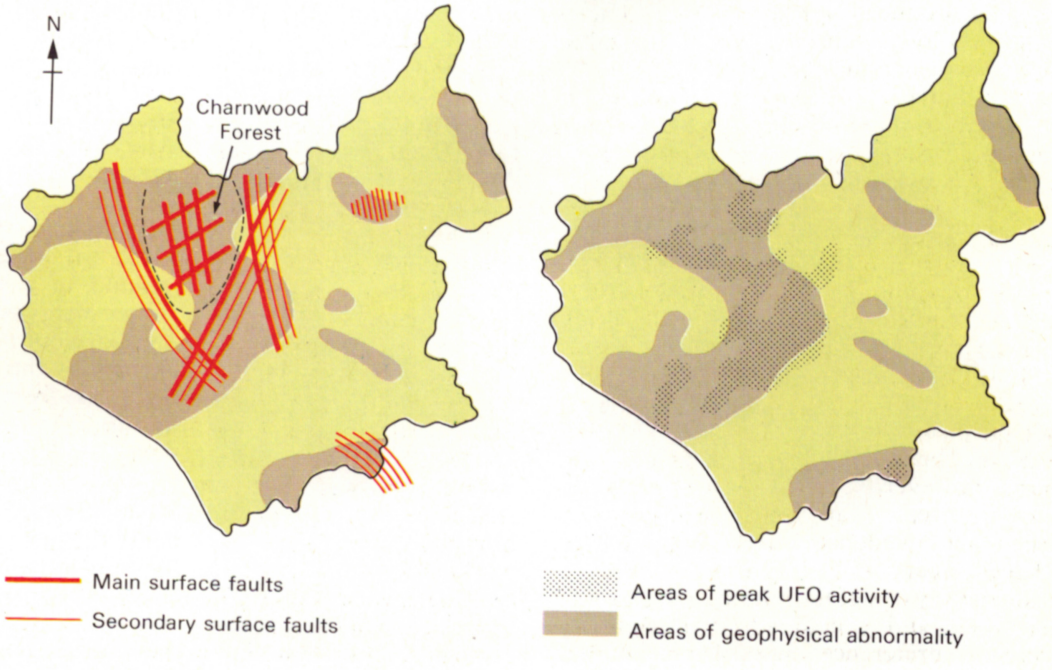


of the county: 'extraordinary flashes of lightning' broke from angry-looking clouds, accompanied by 'terrible' claps of thunder. This went on for some time but no rain fell. At length, hailstones of unusual shapes were precipitated. Then the atmosphere came alive with crackles and bangs 'like muskets', and 'prodigious eruptions of fire' were seen flying close to the ground. Some of these uprooted trees and destroyed houses. Eventually, the strange geophysical display came to an end as mysteriously and suddenly as it had started. Again, in the following century, at the village of Shepshed – also on Charnwood – the local vicar recorded in his diaries that unusual auroras were to be seen in the local skies displaying 'strong vibrations or dartings'. These appeared in all parts of the heavens in every season for nine years, so they were clearly something other than mere 'northern lights'. In more modern times, exceptional geophysical events have occurred, such as the fall of the largest amount of debris from a single meteorite ever to have been recorded in Britain. This took place on Christmas Eve 1965 at Barwell, about 10 miles (16 kilometres) south of Charnwood. Buildings were damaged by the bombardment from space, and last-minute Christmas shoppers cowered in shop doorways, but no one was injured. Ten years later another extraordinary event afflicted this otherwise normal village: a fireball – presumably ball lightning – bounced down a street in the village. It was described as being about 3 feet (1 metre) in diameter. It eventually came in contact with a house and exploded.

Freak thunderstorms

The Leicestershire study suggested that the parts of the county most likely to experience exceptional seismic and meteorological displays coincide with the main network of the county's faults, in the western half of the shire, particularly on and around Charnwood. This was to be expected with regard to seismic activity, but why should unusual meteorological events also be so associated? Most *normal* thunderstorm activity occurs in the east of the county, so the researchers came to the conclusion that there must be some magnetic or electrical factors in the vicinity of fault regions that in some way cause or enhance exceptional atmospheric phenomena.

Additional support for this hypothesis came when carefully compiled UFO sightings for the county were correlated with the geophysical data. The incidence of reported UFO activity seemed clearly to follow a remarkably similar distribution in the landscape to geological fault lines. It was hard to avoid the conclusion that, whatever the conditions are that produce exceptional meteorological events such as earthquake



Right: two maps of the county of Leicestershire showing the main areas of geological faulting and the peak incidence of UFOs. The result of a research project carried out between 1972 and 1976, the maps show that the patterns of UFO incidence and geological faulting are remarkably similar.
(NB the maps show the county of Leicestershire as it was before the redefinition of English county boundaries in 1974)

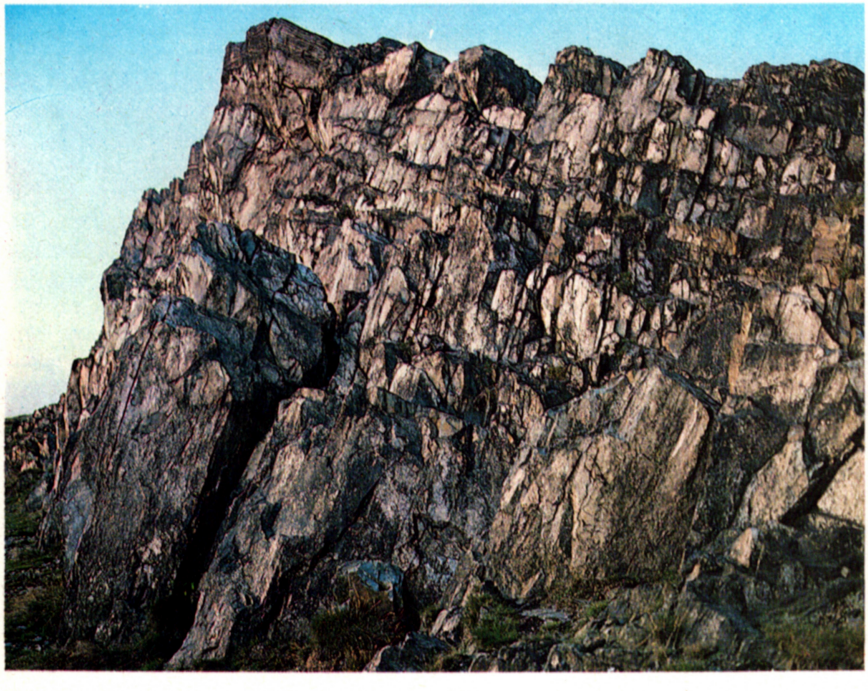
lights, they also favour the occurrence of UFOs. Are UFOs therefore a special but related type of geophysical phenomenon? Research carried out in the USA, in which the state of Michigan has been subjected to a similar study by the Michigan Anomaly Bureau, has suggested the same interpretation of UFOs.

A British research project has sought to extend the microcosmic study of the type attempted in Leicestershire to a wider context. Over 800 UFO cases were taken from records of 19 separate, randomly selected years from 1904 to 1977. They were plotted as carefully as the available data would allow on a map of England and Wales. This information was then correlated with population information supplied in units of 1 square kilometre (0.4 square miles) by Her Majesty's Stationery Office. The resulting map gives some idea of what a population-corrected picture of UFO incidence in England and Wales would look like. It is important to have such correction in a UFO map because the fact that knowledge of a UFO event relies on witnesses means that population distribution can affect the apparent distribution of UFO incidence. In rural England and Wales there may be less than 125 people per square mile (50 people per square kilometre) whereas in a conurbation like Greater London, for example, there can be over 12,500 people per square mile (5000 people per square kilometre). So the chances of a UFO that appears in a rural region being unobserved are many times greater than in an urban region. Moreover, the chances of misperception of ordinary aerial lights are greatly increased in city skies, thus further inflating the likelihood that more UFOs will be reported in city areas.

The resulting map is a symbolical one; it is representative rather than exhaustive, based as it is upon a random sample, but it is the best available of its kind for England and Wales. It gives an indication of what the actual distribution of UFO activity might be. If this map is compared with one showing the distribution of earth tremor epicentres for England and Wales, a remarkable correlation can be seen. There is more information about epicentres than about UFOs, but the general similarity of distribution cannot be missed.

Above: the Hanging Stone Rocks, Leicestershire, showing the impressive rock strata in this area of Charnwood Forest. In 1957, during an earth tremor centred on Charnwood Forest, many people reported 'tadpole-shaped' lights

Below: a massive rock formation near the village of Shepshed on Charnwood Forest. An 18th-century vicar reported seeing strange lights with 'strong vibrations or dartings'



Miraculous phenomena?

It is interesting to note the positions on the UFO map of the 'window areas' at Barmouth, Dyfed and Warminster. The Barmouth cases occurred during a wave of UFO activity that took place in 1904 and 1905. Many lights in the forms of globes and other strange shapes were reported, witnessed by all sections of the local populace as well as by outsiders in the form of journalists from London. The lights were, at the time, widely believed to be miraculous phenomena produced through the agency of a Methodist preacher, Mrs Mary Jones (see page 750). Analysis of these reports has proved informative because they contain a number of eyewitness accounts that confirm that the lights first appeared close to, or actually emerged from, the ground in a significant number of cases. Three clergymen at Cefn Mawr, inland from the Barmouth-Tywyn area along the valley formed by the great Bala Fault, saw balls of light 'rise from the earth and suddenly burst luridly'. Another witness, at the village of Dyffryn, near Barmouth, saw three columns of light emerge from the ground in January 1905, while in May of the same year a similar manifestation was seen by another man in which the column also produced balls of light. A husband and wife saw balls of deep red light emerging from a field next to a chapel near Harlech on the night of 25 March

1905. And so on. But a particularly significant sighting took place a little later that year. In July a witness saw 'a ball of misty light in the heavens about 7 or 8 inches [17 or 20 centimetres] in diameter . . . then it got very much brighter, and . . . grew very much larger . . . forming an oval shape . . . it glittered and quivered very much. Then there appeared to be two great long streaks of misty light coming from the ball which almost reached the earth.' This is surely the account of the 'birth' of a UFO. Another witness saw the same light shortly afterwards, by which time it was flying freely and was intensely brilliant. Could the 'streaks of misty light' be the 'searchlight beams' that are a common feature of UFO reports of more recent times? Could it be that, in these reports, it is only *assumed* that the beams of light come from the UFO? Perhaps they are really some form of discharge streamer emerging from the ground.

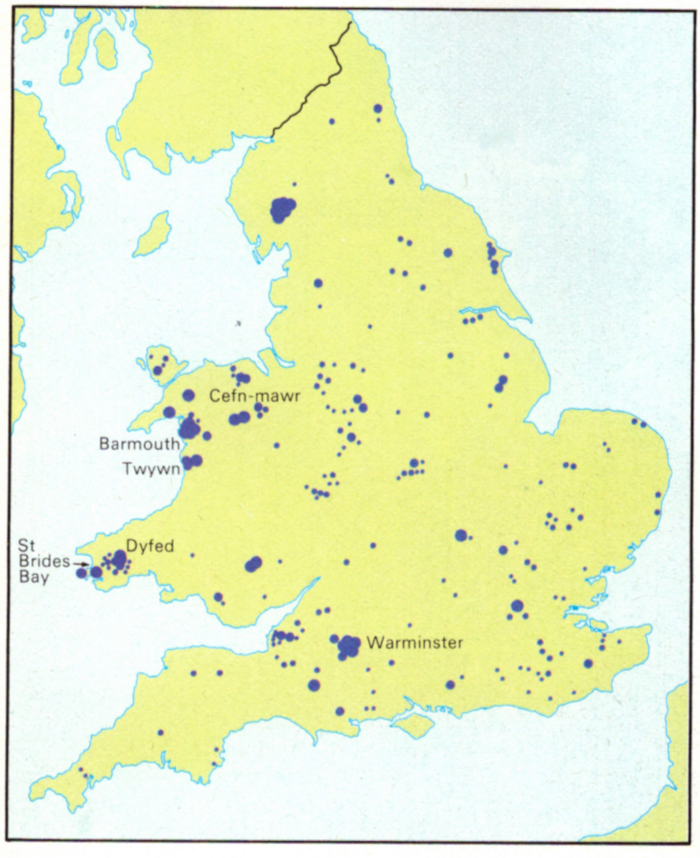
Above: artist John Petts's impression of a curious light he saw during a spate of UFO sightings that occurred around St Brides Bay, Dyfed, in 1977

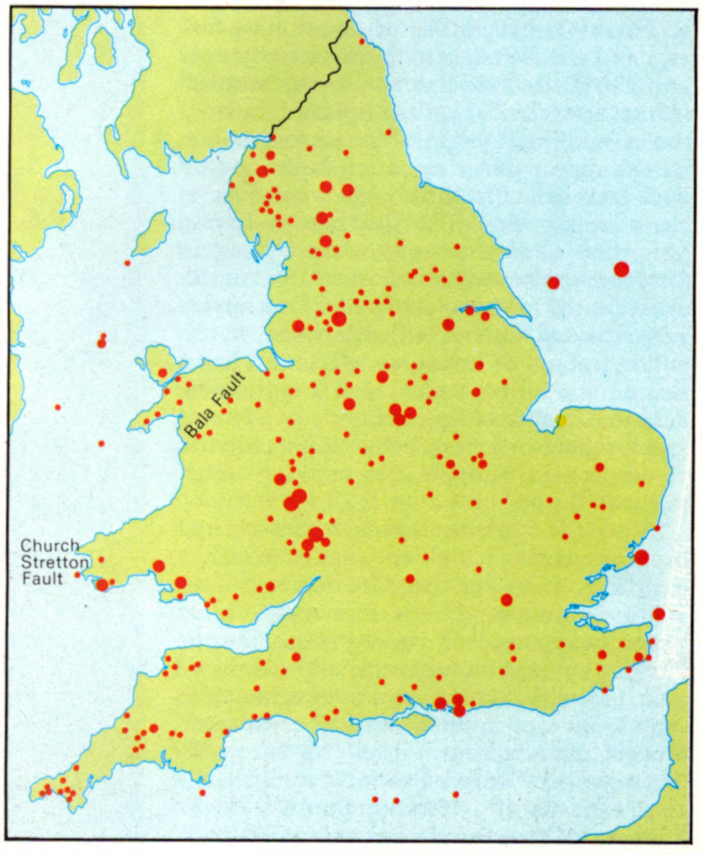
Below: maps of England and Wales comparing selected UFO sightings (blue) to earthquake epicentres

Experimental evidence, too, seems to hint that UFOs may be formed in the ground. An experiment carried out in 1981 by Dr Brian Brady of the US Bureau of Mines in Denver, Colorado, has provided laboratory evidence to demonstrate that geology can produce luminous atmospheric effects. By subjecting a piece of granite to immense pressure, he produced and filmed short-lived points of light in the air around the rock sample. They would streak away, hover and sometimes move along fractures – faults – in the piece of granite. This seems to indicate what can occur when rocks affected by seismic action are squeezed and pulled and strange lights are seen in the sky. Enormous forces are involved, even if no actual earthquake results.

Research, testimony and experiment all appear to indicate that UFOs do not come from Venus, alpha Centauri or via holes at the poles – they come from planet Earth, the most mysterious world of them all.

On page 2346: the connection between megaliths, fault lines and gravitational anomalies





The elusive zoo

The creatures responsible for mystery cat sightings are almost never caught and rarely leave physical evidence behind. JANET and COLIN BORD speculate that some of these elusive animals may be ghostly in nature

WITH ITS MANY MILES of mountains, forests and moorland, populated only by deer and sheep, Scotland might seem the ideal habitat for members of the big cat family. If the many sighting reports can be relied on, it would appear that these animals are indeed well-established in the country, contrary to the textbook view. The sightings go back a long time, at least to 1927 when farmers in Inverness-shire were suffering the mysterious deaths of sheep and goats. One farmer was reported to have killed 'a large, fierce, yellow animal of unknown species'. Then a second was killed, and a third was trapped. London Zoo identified one body as a lynx, a species that is normally believed not to live in Great Britain, though it is native to other parts of Europe.

Since the 1920s there have been sightings of mysterious 'cats' in many areas of Scotland, from the Borders region in the south to Sutherland in the far north. A black puma was reported in Ayrshire during August 1979. Although officially dismissed as an ordinary domestic cat, those who saw it, including an animal welfare inspector, Robert Dunbar, were not so sure. Mr Dunbar said: 'It has all the characteristics of the puma family. Without doubt it is the largest cat I have come across . . . his body length is about four feet [1.2 metres].'

Also during the summer of 1979 a lorry driver, H.C. Mullin, saw a big cat on a motorway on the outskirts of Glasgow. He wrote:

> It was early on a Saturday morning in summer, the sky was bright and visibility quite good. The animal was greyish in colour, with white tufts of hair on its side. It walked with a peculiar padding motion on big flat feet or paws. It had a very long tail, quite smooth, which swept back in a long upward curve. I thought it was an American cougar, or mountain lion; but I'm no expert on cats. I actually stopped the lorry and ran across the road to see it going through a thick hedge. Then I realised that this was a big cat and might be partial to a bit of lorry driver for tiffin. So I ran back to the safety of the cab and drove off.

Further north in Inverness-shire there were a number of sightings during late 1979 and early 1980. Ted Noble of Cannich was only one of many farmers finding their sheep killed and partly eaten by an unknown predator. Mr Noble sighted a big cat in October

Left: a mystery cat caged. A Scottish farmer, Ted Noble, caught this puma (above) in a baited trap in October 1980. For a year the creature had been preying on local livestock, such as the roe deer whose remains are here exhibited (below) by two golf course greenkeepers. A local man later admitted to having set two pet pumas loose in the district on the eve of going to prison

Above right: the Nottinghamshire lion hunt of summer 1976 was one of the largest mystery cat searches carried out in Britain, employing a helicopter and hundreds of police officers. Despite numerous sightings by members of the public, the search was unsuccessful

Right: that any of the British mystery cats should be African lions is as incredible as that they should be pumas – but some eyewitnesses insist that these are what they saw

Below: locations of some of the big cat sightings in England and Wales

1979 and then made a second sighting in August 1980. As the police seemed unable to take any positive action to protect his livestock, Mr Noble decided to set a trap, using a sheep's head as a bait. On 29 October, when he and his son went to check the trap, they heard growling and realised that they had caught something. That 'something' turned out to be . . . a real live puma.

Mr Noble was triumphant: 'People were beginning to think I was nuts the way I was obsessed with capturing the animal.' However, the mystery did not end there. The puma was taken off to a wildlife park, the director of which had never believed that such animals were living wild in the area. He announced that Mr Noble's catch was too domesticated to have survived in a wild environment. He thought someone had played a hoax on Mr Noble, releasing an unwanted pet only a short while before the capture. However, analysis of the puma's droppings immediately after the capture showed, according to Dr Hans Kruuk of the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, that the animal had been living wild for some time. But Dr Kruuk also agreed that the animal must have lived in captivity during its life, because it was very tame. This was finally confirmed: a local man, about to go to prison, had released two pet pumas.

In any case, puma sightings in the area did not cease with the capture of the Cannich beast. There were several more during that autumn and winter, including one on 7 December by a retired shipping company director and his wife, Mr and Mrs Duggan. They saw a 'puma-like animal', on the banks of the River Enrick between Cannich and Loch Ness. They also found its paw prints, which were puma-like.

Sightings also continued in other parts of

Is there a colony of cat-like creatures living on Dartmoor (top)? There have been numerous sightings in the area since the 1930s. The animals are the size of large dogs, but look like pumas. Di Francis, a naturalist (above), has glimpsed one herself and spends long vigils on the moor looking for more specimens. She is seen here examining a cast of paw prints apparently made by the animals

Above right: dogs are frequently blamed for mystery 'cat' reports. This magnificent Great Dane, comparable in size and weight with some of the big cats, makes the theory seem plausible as an explanation for at least some sightings

Below right: Mr Stephen Joyce, of Tonmawr village in Wales, points to the spot where, early in 1982, he saw a creature resembling a puma. Other villagers saw an animal that they described as like a young tiger – 6 feet (1.8 metres) long, with a curled tail, and 'very ugly'. Paw prints were found in snow. A local animal welfare officer speculated that the animal could be an ocelot (inset), normally native to North and South America

Scotland. In April 1981 several people in the Halfway area of Lanarkshire saw a big cat. The witnesses included policemen, and Christopher and Gerrard Struth, who saw it while they were out shooting pigeons. They said: 'It was less than 50 yards [45 metres] away when we spotted it. In our minds it was either a very large wildcat or some sort of puma.' In November and December of the same year sightings were reported in southern Scotland, in the Lothian and Borders areas.

The existence of pumas in Britain is hard enough to accept; the idea that lions might also be roaming the countryside is even more outrageous. But there have been a number of sighting reports that must be taken seriously. When considering them, it must be borne in mind that people unfamiliar with the cat family might catch a fleeting glimpse of any big cat and think it was a lion – perhaps because the only big cat they know anything of is the lion. There was a big 'lion' scare in July and August 1976, when the Nottinghamshire lion hunt became national news. It all started in the early morning of 29 July, when two milkmen at Tollerton, near Nottingham, had the fright of their lives. David Crowther reported: 'We both saw together what certainly to us was a lion. It was 50 yards [45 metres] away, had its head down and its long tail had a bushy end. It was walking away from us but only very slowly.' David Bentley added: 'If I had been on my own I don't think I would have told anyone, because they wouldn't have believed it. But it was there and we both saw it together.' The police took the report seriously, and local people were advised to stay indoors.

An extensive police search of the area using dogs and helicopters revealed absolutely no trace of a lion or any other unexpected beast, while no reports came in of lions missing from zoos. Police puzzlement grew as the number of sightings climbed to 18. Four days later they were still looking, rather wearily no doubt; and then the lion was seen by Dr John Chisholm, deputy coroner for the county. He saw its hindquarters as it made its way through undergrowth towards a stream in his garden at Normanton on the Wolds, and he watched it with his wife and son from an upstairs window. However, when police arrived their car lights seemed to disturb the animal, which disappeared and could not be found. When the police hunt was a week old and, despite 65 sighting reports, nothing had been found, no livestock had been reported killed and no lion escapes were known, interest in the animal died down. Apparently the lion (if that is what it was) has not been seen again in the Nottingham district.

However, the animal may have left the area. Only a few days after the last sighting of the Nottinghamshire scare, Alan Pestell claimed to have seen 'a large lioness' in Yorkshire, 70 miles (115 kilometres) north of Nottingham.

A Bedfordshire chiropodist, Adrian Grier, claimed to have seen a lion early in June 1981 near Toddington. He saw it in his car headlights and at first thought it was a Great Dane. But as he got nearer, to within 30 feet (10 metres) of it, he became convinced he was looking at a lion. Police were sceptical and asked if it could have been a large dog, a deer, or even a cow. Mr Grier commented: 'It must have been 6 feet (1.8 metres) long,

more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet [1 metre] tall, very powerfully built and the colour of a Great Dane. It had bloody great feet, and was loping along. It didn't look like a cow!' No big cats were missing from nearby zoos, and police searches found no trace of any lion.'

During the following weeks two further sightings were reported that could be of the same animal. Only two days after Mr Grier's experience, a man in nearby Luton was followed by 'the largest dog he had ever seen. It was similar to a Great Dane but the coat was different. It was a bit like an Irish wolfhound that had had its coat cut.' He assumed it must be a dog because he couldn't think what else it could be. The animal followed him and he dared not run in case it attacked him. Later, a woman driving in the same area saw a strange animal run across the road ahead of her. 'The animal was quite huge, streamlined and very fast,' she reported. Lion, puma, or dog?

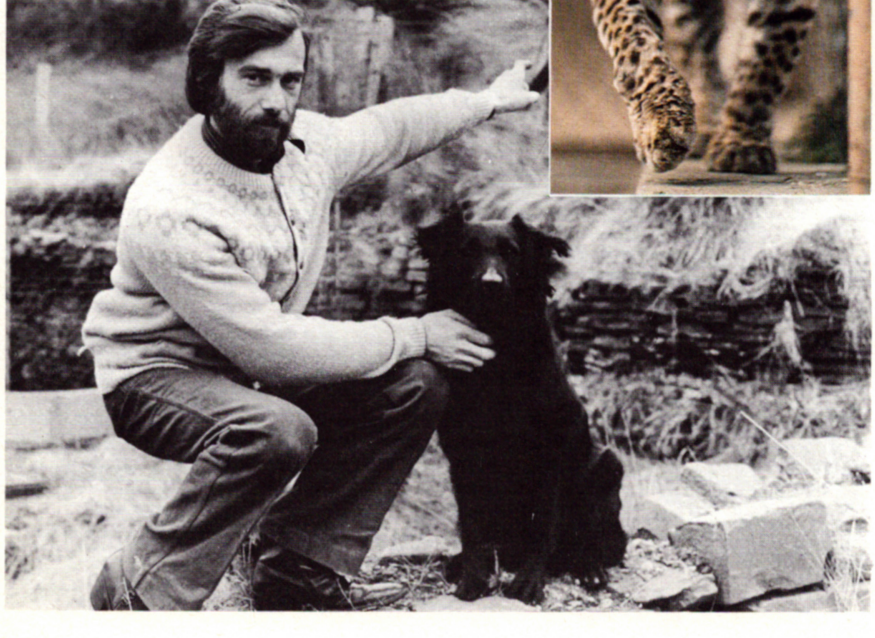
Countrywide cats

There seem to be few parts of Britain that the big cats have not visited. During 1981 and 1982 reports came from: the Hampton Lucy area of south Warwickshire, where farmers found lambs and a deer with their throats ripped out, and sightings were made of a creature 'larger than an Alsatian dog with a shaggy black coat', which moved like a large cat; Wellington College in Berkshire, where a 'black panther' was seen in the playing fields; Tonmawr in the Neath Valley of South Wales, where a cat 6 feet (1.8 metres) long was seen by several people early in 1982; and Dartmoor, in Devon, where big cats have been seen sporadically over many years. Di Francis, a naturalist who actively searched for the animals responsible, reported that there had been 370 sightings in 12 months, many involving black cats.

Although the authorities seem not to want to believe it, it is quite clear that members of the big cat family are roaming around Britain and making a successful living off the land. There are too many sightings by reliable people, too many reports of livestock attacked by non-native predators, not to mention footprints and farmer Noble's successful trapping exercise. Whether the number of big cats on the loose can satisfactorily be explained by the escape or intentional freeing of pets is another matter, probably impossible to resolve. But even supposing that many of the big cats are former pets that became too troublesome or expensive to maintain, there are still mysteries. Why, when intensive police searches are made, do the creatures seem able to disappear into thin air, leaving neither hair nor footprint nor dropping behind them? Could it possibly be that some at least of the big cats are insubstantial wraiths? It is likely that they are, because Britain has a strong tradition of spectral dogs, large, often black, and sometimes with cat-like features. Here, as a sample, are some reports of a ghost dog in Cheshire. This one was yellow or light tan, and used to run through the fields and lanes of Godley Green, sometimes chasing cattle – very similar behaviour to today's big cats! One man was followed by it. It stopped when he stopped, and ran beside him when he ran. When he tried to hit it, his hand went through it and hit the hedge. A lady who saw it at the end of the 19th century as it stood beside a frozen pond thought it was a lion that had escaped from the zoo, and backed away. It followed her, but vanished before she reached the safety of the house where she was staying. She did not know that the house was haunted by a large yellow dog, and the fact that she thought it was a lion gives us a strong link between sightings of ghost dogs and today's so-called big cat sightings. However, until witnesses become brave enough to approach the 'pumas' we must remain uncertain as to their true identity.

Further reading

Janet and Colin Bord, *Alien animals*, Granada 1980
Jerome Clark and Loren Coleman, *Creatures of the outer edge*, Warner (New York) 1978
John A. Keel, *Strange creatures from time and space*, Sphere 1976



Psi: this year's model

Gone are apports, hibernating birds and ectoplasm as subjects of paranormal investigations. In are ESP, UFOs and metal bending. BOB RICKARD asks why there should be such fashions and fads in bizarre phenomena

THE EARLY HISTORY of Spiritualism produced floods of ectoplasm, hosts of full-bodied materialisations, and enough apports to stock a department store. Yet before and after a period bridging the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these phenomena of physical mediumship are almost unheard of. The fashion in phenomena has changed – and so has the fashion in psychical research. Investigators of today have all but deserted the seance for the laboratory and tests of metal bending, ESP and the like.

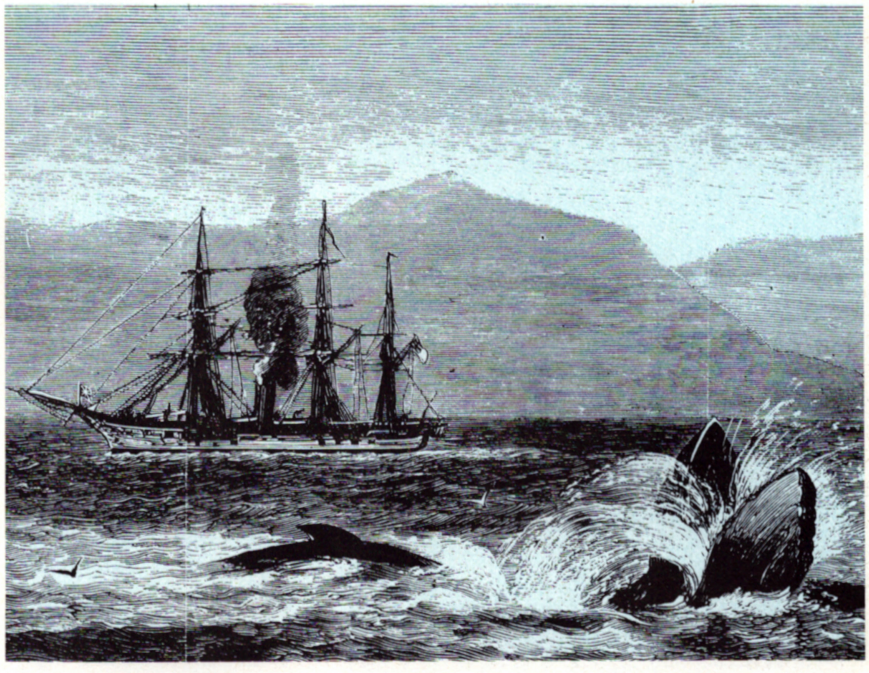
Could it be that, as Charles Fort observed in the early 20th century: 'There are phenomena that exist relatively to one age, that do not, or do not so pronouncedly, exist in another age'?

Another example of a phenomenon no longer in vogue is that of certain birds hibernating over the winter in dark dry places, usually underground. Although this idea is not taken seriously by 20th-century naturalists, it was not dismissed by such eminent founders of the natural sciences as Linnaeus and Baron Cuvier. And a number of cases were reported in 18th- and 19th-century science memoires and discussed in professional journals such as the *Zoologist*. Gradually, however, the reports ceased and the phenomenon was forgotten. This fact was noticed by Philip Gosse, the populariser of science, who included a not entirely sceptical review of the subject in the second volume of his celebrated *Romance of natural history* (1861). Gosse wondered why discoveries of hibernating birds 'instead of increasing in frequency with the increase of scientific research and communication, strangely become more rare'.

There are a number of possible reasons for this. Scientific literature has become more rigorous and academic, and the anecdotal and circumstantial nature of the evidence for

bird hibernation is regarded as weak. In the modern climate of scepticism, few scientists would risk their career by opposing the almost universally accepted doctrine of bird migration. The adoption of explosives and heavy machines for demolition and earth removal could have destroyed evidence that might have been uncovered in the days of the spade and shovel. Finally, there may have been a change in the instinctive behaviour of the birds – something that is not unknown to happen in animals as the environment changes.

Of course, a distinction has to be made as to whether the appearance or disappearance of certain kinds of phenomenon are the result of increased knowledge or the product of social processes. For example, the pioneering ufologist John Keel has shown that only a fraction of the UFOs seen ever get reported, and only a fraction of those reported ever get publicised. Consequently he and other ufologists have warned of the shock to society if the true proportion of the phenomenon were ever disclosed. Along the same lines, judging from the newspapers, it would seem that the once ubiquitous sea serpent (see page 90) has suffered virtual extinction. Not so, according to the world's greatest expert on these creatures, Dr Bernard Heuvelmans. After compiling a chronology of sightings between the years 1639 and 1964 for his book *In the wake of the sea serpents* (1968), Heuvelmans remains convinced that they are still averaging about two a year. The apparent decline, he says, is a product of the shyness of the creatures, the fact that modern shipping keeps largely to well-defined routes, and to fear of ridicule. As he puts it: 'The sound of laughter has driven away as many sea serpents as that of ships' engines.'



Above left: Philip Gosse, the British naturalist, discussed the discovery of frogs in stone – a widely reported phenomenon at one time – in his book *Romance of natural history* (1861), in which the illustration (far left) appeared

Above: a sea serpent in the Gulf of Suez, sighted by HMS *Philomel* in 1879. Once common in mariners' reports, such sightings have declined, especially since the second half of the 19th century

Left: *The South Sea Bubble*, painted by E.M. Ward. This frenzied stock speculation in the South Sea Company reached its height in 1720, when thousands of Britons gambled – and lost – all they had on a get-rich-quick scheme to exploit the imagined riches of South America. This speculative madness was the kind of phenomenon that might be explained as some form of unconscious mass hysteria

But nothing has driven away the lake monsters, which have been regularly if sporadically sighted for centuries. Indeed, since the Loch Ness monster surfaced in 1933 (see page 214), sightings of huge serpent-like creatures have proliferated in lakes all over the world. Another long-lived phenomenon is that of stigmata (see page 846), although the first instance did not occur until nearly 1200 years after the Crucifixion. Since St Francis of Assisi was stigmatised in 1224, however, there has been hardly a year without a report of a stigmata case.

To most of us, the things we perceive around us in our everyday lives are solid and real. They are the tangible proof of that state of existence we agree by consensus to call reality, so it seems preposterous that the furniture of reality can be subject to the whims of something as ephemeral as fashion. But there can be as many definitions of reality as there are people to perceive it. Research into coincidence has established strong links between the unconscious mind, of both individuals and the collective, and the phenomena of reality. For example, the familiar story of how a lost or stolen item finds its way back to its owner, often through a revealing dream, recurs consistently. The German psychologist Wilhelm von Scholz thought that the coincidences in such cases were so outrageous to the view of conventional physical causality that he was moved to believe they must have been 'stage-managed . . . as if they were the dreams of a greater and more comprehensive consciousness . . . .'

The theory towards which von Scholz was

Left: St Francis of Assisi receives the stigmata of Christ, as depicted by the great medieval engraver Albrecht Dürer. Although it was nearly 1200 years after the crucifixion before the first instance of stigmata occurred, it is a phenomenon that has stayed in fashion – and hardly a year goes by without a report of it

Below right: the ring lost in a pool by Queen Nest is found in a fish served up to her husband, King Maelgwn Gwynedd of North Wales, in the presence of St Asaph. This 6th-century legend is one of many in which lost or stolen items find their way back to their owner seemingly by coincidence

groping in 1924 is surely close to what many Forteans and others subscribe to today: that powerful projections from the unconscious of archetypal forms or behaviour are able to manifest themselves in what we call reality, or to alter that reality by influencing related events. This semi-mystical view is related to three converging streams of thought. One explores the world of meaningful coincidence (see page 658), which Carl Gustav Jung termed synchronicity. Another is the hypothesis of 'formative causation' proposed by Dr Rupert Sheldrake (see page 1141), which describes a mechanism for the communication, beyond the normal restrictions of space and time, of form and behaviour in nature. The third concerns 'tulpas' or thought forms (see page 1690) and the way a consensus can influence reality by creating its own separate 'bubble' of reality.

The crazes or obsessions that can grip a community as well as an individual exemplify this. In Gustave Le Bon's neglected study, *The crowd* (1897), he showed how a community can be galvanised in such a way that a particular set of ideas or imagery – sublime or trivial – will dominate their perceptions, actions and rationalisations of their own unusual behaviour. The magic wand that turns a group of individuals into a crowd or mob is simply a shared state of heightened suggestibility. Le Bon thought that this was brought about when any group of people in physical proximity became suddenly aligned psychologically by any unusual stimulus.

This type of phenomenon is characterised in the title to Charles Mackay's pioneering historical study, *Memoirs of extraordinary popular delusions and the madness of crowds* (1852). In this book he discusses the medieval craze for relics, the South Sea bubble swindle, the frenzied witch hunts, the wild and wasteful Crusades, to name a few. The medieval dancing manias are another example of some kind of unconscious collective behaviour. The dancing could be set off instantly by the sight of a pointed shoe, a snatch of music, the colour red, the rant of a preacher, the sight of someone already dancing, or the imagined bite of a tarantula.

On the basis of the 'projections' theory, and by extension of Le Bon's idea, we might say that a 'crowd' need not be together physically. Its constituents can be spread widely apart – even over a whole country – and become aligned through individual contact with the collective unconscious, so that an idea arising out of this unconscious would occur to them all. An excellent example of this curious form of collective hysteria occurred in France in 1789, called the 'Great Fear' by historians. It began immediately after the fall of the Bastille in Paris. Entire villages were abandoned as rumours reached them of a huge army of brigands killing and looting their way towards them. Terrified

Below: a 'trial' dominated by the mob during the Reign of Terror in France in 1793. One theory of mass hysteria says that a crowd need not be a group of people in close proximity, as in this case, but may be made up of groups in different places acting with the same hysteria caused by the same stimulus through some kind of unconscious collective behaviour

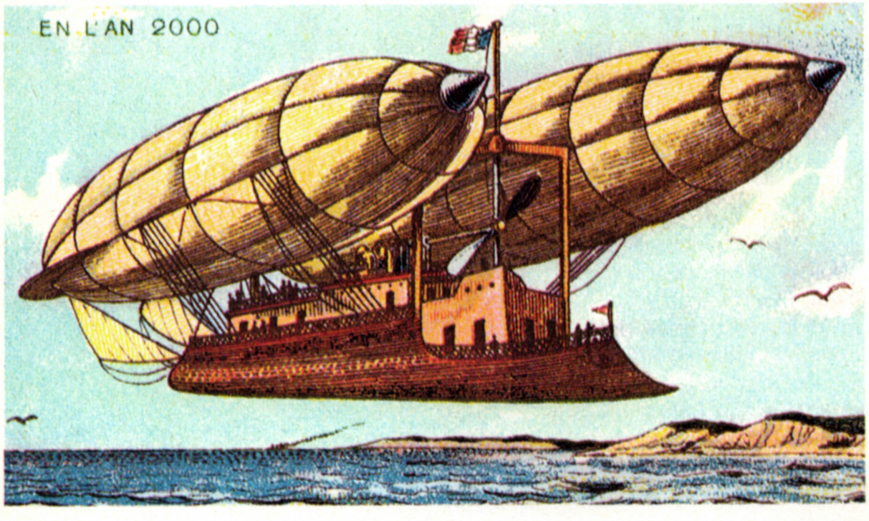
people babbled of seeing the flames of burning houses in the sky, of being captured and of seeing friends killed by brutal bandits, and so on. But the whole affair had been hallucinated. The panic had not even spread out from Paris in the ordinary way, as rumours carried by travellers. Instead it seems to have sprung up independently in several locations across France, and spread out like a forest fire from each of these. Historians are at a loss to explain how a panic could grow faster than anyone could travel at the time, whereas the theory that people all over France formed a crowd goes far towards an explanation. The populace was in a state of suggestibility due to general anxiety about the political crisis, and became aligned by threatening images that can only be guessed at. The initial outbreaks needed only a simple stimulus such as a flash of lightning – some unusual natural phenomena were recorded in association with the Great Fear – and rumour and panic did the rest.

There are some phenomena that have not varied much throughout history, among them pathological and mental illness, strange falls from the sky (see page 150) and ball lightning (see page 218). But the explanations of them have been subject to the fashions in belief and consequently have been attributed to a succession of gods, devils, elementals, ghosts, fairies, witches, psychic powers or aliens. And we should not dismiss even the most bizarre testimony as merely quaint contemporary imagery if we accept that they might be accurate descriptions of spontaneous hallucinations and/or thought forms.

For example, consider the huge flying machines with powerful searchlights and 'foreign-looking crews' seen in the skies across North America in 1896 and 1897 – at a time when there were no lighter- or heavier-than-air craft in existence. These sightings cannot all have been misidentifications of natural phenomena. The late 19th century was the heyday of the hero-inventor such as Thomas Edison and Nikola Tesla; where today's mysteries of the skies are attributed to UFOs, that era attributed them to unidentified inventors. It was only when Andrew Rothovius compared some of the 1897 incidents with the Great Fear (in *Pursuit* magazine, 1978) that the airship sightings were seen to have originated in the same way as the phantom pillagers: spontaneously, from apparently unconnected initial incidents in several different locations throughout the country, and then by rumour.

Jung thought that the UFO was a sign of changes in the constellation of archetypes in the human unconscious, and that this anti-gravity, dream-like disc of light was an omen of the need for psychic unity at a time when the split between people's rational, scientific side and their instinctive, mystical side had never been greater. Jung could not know of the later developments in UFO manifestations, bringing the frightening abductions and sinister behaviour of fantastic entities. Perhaps he would have agreed with John Rimmer, the editor of the ufology magazine *Magonia*, that the UFO has become 'the anti-science symbol *par excellence*'.

Projections from the unconscious have the power of archetypes: they are symbols of unconscious forces, and address themselves to our main personal and collective anxieties. They can possess us and direct our actions, sweeping through a community like a rumour – indeed, Jung likened the UFO to a 'visual rumour'. The same might be said of today's monsters, which appear in strikingly archaic forms, as though reminding us that we are eroding our psychic landscape as surely as we are spoiling the world's last wildernesses. Our weird phenomena are our collective dreams. We must learn from them.



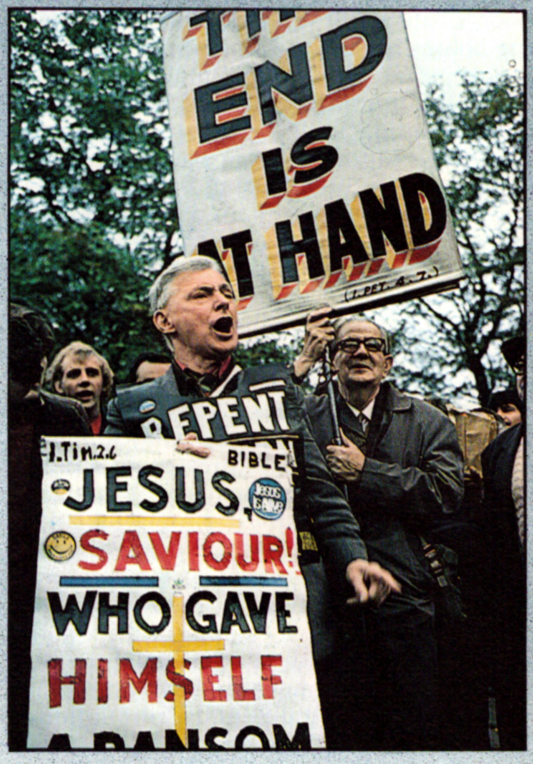
Mass hysteria takes many forms, such as the medieval dancing crazes (top), in which whole villages danced as if demented until the individuals dropped from exhaustion. But during such 'fits', strange phenomena have been reported, suggesting that the mob behaviour somehow transcends time and space. For example, the airship seen over Chicago in Illinois during the spate of sightings in 1896–1897 was exactly like that drawn as a prediction of flight (above) some years later

The last generation?

Prepare to meet thy doom – that is the message of numerous small Christian groupings now flourishing throughout the world. KEVIN McCLURE examines these grim warnings and their origins in the scriptures

CHRISTIANS PROFESS that on some more or less distant day the world as we know it will end; and that when the end comes, it will not be by chance or mistake, but because Almighty God has in some way decided that it should.

But though this belief – even prophecy – is an article of faith for all Christians and though it would seem to be expounded reasonably clearly in some parts of the Bible, it is only fair to point out that few Christians dwell on it. After the fire-and-brimstone preaching of the last century had gone out of fashion, most churchgoers gave little thought to what are often called the 'end times', or what the Second Coming of Christ may entail, until the rise of the Evangelical movement in the early 1960s, particularly in the USA. The belief that we are already in the end times is now becoming very powerful indeed.



Right: the message of the soap-box evangelist is powerfully backed up by the warning on the placard. But is the end at hand not only for each of us as mortal individuals but for the world as a whole?

At the height of rioting in Miami, Florida, in 1980, a sign in the street pleads for peace through religion. But civil commotion and wars between nations are seen by some fundamentalist groups as doomed to grow worse as God's plans for the end of the world unfold

There have, of course, always been groups, individuals, and religious movements who believe that they have been given two particular truths: the information that the world is to end soon, and the secret of how they must live and behave to survive that end and be uniquely assured of safety and salvation. We have all heard tales of believers huddled in underground shelters, or shivering on mountain-tops, or waiting to be taken away by flying saucers. There is even the story of some Australians who, convinced a monster tidal wave was coming, bought all the beer they could find and sat and waited on the beach. This may be pure legend but, on a larger scale, Jehovah's Witnesses have now had several stabs at picking the right date for the world's end. And members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints – the Mormons – are advised to maintain at all times a year's supply of food and other provisions: this provides families with security not only against personal misfortunes, such as loss of work, but also against civil disturbances or natural catastrophes.

A factor such beliefs and prophecies have

Above: at the founding of the state of Israel on 14 May 1948 David Ben-Gurion, the new prime minister, addresses Jewish leaders. The founding of Israel is interpreted by some as the fulfilment of biblical prophecy, marking the beginning of the Last Days

in common is that, so far, they have been mistaken. Though the Second Coming has been actively anticipated since the early years of the Church (there is reason to believe that it was first expected to take place in AD 100) it has never occurred – as far as we know. The failures in public prophecy have been numerous; the cost in dashed pride, hope, and credibility enormous. Yet as the year 2000 approaches, prophecy and belief in prophecy become more popular than ever – Benjamin Creme, the Scot who predicted the return of Christ in east London in June 1982, was only one of the prophetic voices.

Spotting the signs

However, the whole business of prophesying the end of the world has become a great deal more sophisticated. Bowing to the clear statement of Matthew 24:36, 'But of that day and hour knoweth no man . . . but my father only', prophets have largely set aside the prediction of precise dates. Instead, two elements are combined to give believers the sense of urgency that used to derive from the belief that the world would end 'a week on Tuesday'. First, the year 2000 has a certain magical quality; people instinctively expect *something* dramatic to happen then. And second, believers are encouraged to identify the various 'signs' – as they are understood to be outlined in the Bible, which is accepted as literally true – signifying the imminence of Christ's return. Many of the Moral Majority groupings in the United States – self-proclaimed defenders of traditional morality, in large part responsible for the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 – hold very much these beliefs.

Modern beliefs regarding the end times are not all new, but most have been developed in a way that relates them specifically to world events of the 20th century. They divide quite neatly into two parts. The first relates to the period in which the 'signs' appear, which runs up to the inevitable appearance of 'Christ in the air', when the 'true Church' is taken up or 'raptured'. The second body of beliefs concerns the following period of the Tribulation, with the coming of the Antichrist, the destruction of Jerusalem, the destruction of a large proportion of the world's population, Armageddon, the Second Coming, and the coming of the Millennium, during which Christ will reign on Earth.

Zionism has existed for a long time, and the movement for the return of the Jews to Palestine has been active since the mid 19th century. The establishment of the State of Israel on 14 May 1948, following the horrors of the Holocaust and in the midst of intense Jewish-Arab warfare, is seen by many interpreters of biblical prophecy as the first sure sign that we are in the end times. They relate it to Jeremiah 29:14, which promises: 'I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.' When success in the Six Day War of 1967 brought Jerusalem under Israeli control, the writing of popular prophecy became big business. Conditions without which few of the other biblical prophecies could be fulfilled had now been realised. Now scholarship, or imagination, could run rife.

There is no doubt that the years since then have been tragic and violent, and any student of bad news, dashed hopes, and Man's habitual inhumanity will have had plenty of material to work upon. And this is just what sign-seeking involves: finding the direst events and trends in world affairs and then looking for possible mention of them in the Bible.

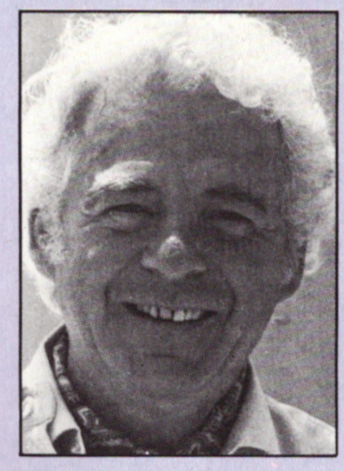
Hal Lindsey is an ebullient, skilful and undoubtedly wealthy American evangelical

Below: representatives of the Common Market meet at Strasbourg. Are these countries the 10 kingdoms that, according to the book of Daniel, will be led by the Antichrist?

The missing Messiah

Mr Benjamin Creme was quite explicit: on 14 May 1982 he announced that the Christ, the World Teacher, had been living in Britain since 19 July 1977 and was now emerging as a spokesman for the Asian community of the Brick Lane area of east London, where he was known as an ordinary man. He was ready now to be made known; but 'the Law governing human free will' required that humanity look for him – he could not simply reveal himself. When he was found, a new age would begin – an age of justice and freedom, sharing and love.

Creme (right) was confident that 21 June was the latest date for 'Declaration Day'. When journalists had combed east London and failed to find the Christ by 21 June, *Share International*, Creme's worldwide magazine, was shaken but resolute. Humanity had not tried hard enough – renewed efforts were required. 'In the very near future it seems that certain cosmic influences will present an even more auspicious opportunity . . . we can, therefore, say with renewed optimism that in a short space of time *something* will happen. . . .' And why was the original announcement so definite? *Share International* says: 'It does not take a great psychologist to determine what the outcome would have been had Creme given only vague dates . . . his message would never have attracted so much attention. . . .'



author. His first major work, *The late great planet Earth*, sold in excess of 15 million copies in its first 11 years. This and his other titles – *Satan is alive and well on planet Earth*, *The terminal generation*, *There's a new world coming*, and *The 1980s: countdown to Armageddon* – sum up his approach. Many others write about the same material, and probably with more authority, but he has almost certainly been the most influential figure in the end times movement.

What are the signs that, these writers claim, have such significance? Do we have to be scholars, or Christians, or fanatics to understand them? Is there really any substance in what is being claimed? And if the claim that the end times are upon us is all imagination, can we disprove it?

In fact, most of the signs are quite obvious. They are largely trends or events that most Westerners are aware of (though it is worth pointing out that in, say, China or India or Africa, accounting for most of the world's population, they would be much less convincing). The links between them and the Bible are often less than obvious, however, and sometimes appear almost entirely subjective. These trends and events fall into four rough groups: political, physical, economic and moral or religious.

The most important political signs are those already mentioned, involving Israel, but there are others. The European Economic Community, or Common Market, is often regarded as fulfilling prophecies in the book of Daniel regarding a fourth and final version of the Roman Empire – for it was founded by the Treaty of Rome. Ten kingdoms are mentioned in Daniel – and the EEC gained its tenth member when Greece joined it in 1981. It is expected that the Antichrist will use his leadership of these 10 kingdoms as a power base. However, the late President Sadat of Egypt and Henry Kissinger have both been seen as possible players for the role of Antichrist.

Hal Lindsey, Jr, was a Mississippi riverboat captain before he became a preacher and then the biggest-selling author of apocalyptic literature. The awesomeness of his theme is belied by the levity of the title of his first major success: *The late great planet Earth*

The book of Ezekiel says: 'I . . . will cause thee to come up from the uttermost parts of the North; and I will bring thee upon the mountains of Israel.' This is linked with the territorial encroachments made by the Soviet Union since the Second World War. The incursion into Afghanistan has been used to focus attention upon the behaviour of an 'anti-Christian' nation, but it is an eventual direct attack upon Israel that is foreseen. The anti-communist attitude of Ronald Reagan's administration encouraged such fears. Hal Lindsey, in particular, sees the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, the supposed Soviet superiority in the arms race, and the upheavals in Iran, as enhancing the chances that the Soviet Union will soon fulfil Ezekiel's prophecy.

Casting the net wide

Other political elements featured in the canon of end times material include the control of the flow of oil by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, majority rule in Zimbabwe, the invasion of the Mecca Mosque by religious fanatics in November 1979, revolution and communism in Latin America, the resurgence of Islam, the power of the Vatican (there is a general fear of Roman Catholicism), and the Bildenberger international economic conferences. The net is certainly cast very wide, and into it seems to fall everything that could be regarded as anti-American.

The significance of the physical signs may be no more clear. Lindsey reports that 'the number of earthquakes per decade has roughly doubled in each of the 10-year periods since 1950.' Others trace the course of events back to the First World War. Reports of famine are, it must be admitted, increasingly common, though possibly that is due to increased reporting of the subject and the involvement of professional charities. Major epidemics still blight parts of the world, as they did Europe and America in

Above: a Russian soldier in Afghanistan. Like all other world events, the Soviet incursion is woven by fundamentalists into the sequence of events marking the last days. Russian activity is seen as building up to a future attack on Israel – an attack doomed to fail, but foreshadowing Armageddon

1918. All of this is related to Matthew 24:7, which warns: 'For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.' Certainly it becomes increasingly difficult to find a period of two months together without a major war in the world; at the same time we are made increasingly aware of the dangers to our environment.

The economic signs are not so easy to take seriously. Because a single international cashless economic system is regarded as being a vital part of the seven-year period leading up to Armageddon, prophets place a peculiar construction upon economic affairs. The Rothschilds, the Rockefellers, the Federal Reserve (America's central bank), international economic co-operation, the increasing use of computers, and the prevalence of the credit card, are all regarded as paving the way for international economic unity and, in turn, world government. Some interpreters and prophets regard this as the work of Satan, and though not all go to such extremes, the basic idea is widely accepted. Of course, these claims, in particular, are almost absurdly restricted in their scope. How many Chinese or Indians – or Russians, indeed – have credit cards?

The moral aspect of the signs – which ties in closely with the religious one – is perhaps the most interesting, and has certainly provided the most inspiration. Everything is hurled in together here. UFOs are regarded as demonic. The rise of religious cults, such as the Unification Church (the Moonies), the Divine Light Mission, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and even other end times groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, is taken to be a sign of the coming end. The Reverend Jim Jones, responsible for the massacre at Jonestown, Guyana (see page 726), seems to be regarded as a dry run for the Antichrist. Of course, there have always been cults, and most of the Millennial groups started off that way. But invariably, anyone the prophet does not agree with belongs to some 'deluded' cult or secret society. What are called, with distaste, 'liberal' churchmen – those who do not have a fundamentalist belief in the literal interpretation of the Bible – are regarded with a similar horror, and the ecumenical movement is seen as a satanic threat.

Almost all the trends in morality from the 1960s onwards are regarded with abhorrence. While abortion on demand, homosexual liberation, pornography, street violence and drug use and abuse can probably be proved to have increased in that period – though they may be either the causes or the symptoms of a sick society – other moral signs seem less certain. A quotation from 2 Timothy 3:1–5 is used:

> This know, also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

It might be thought that it would be possible to find an abundance of all of these faults since first we ventured out of the forests. But for many their latest manifestations are seen as clear intimations that we are, in the words of Matthew, 'the last generation'.

On page 2334: how the prophecies describe the Tribulation and the Antichrist

Right: hungry children are fed at a refugee camp in Ethiopia during severe drought. The world is growing more conscious of the extent and severity of the hunger that afflicts millions. But while the nations make ambitious development plans in an effort to eradicate mass hunger for ever, the end times prophets view such misfortune as a mild foretaste of the tribulations that are inexorably approaching

Once upon a time...

The Cottingley fairy photographs have, since their first publication over 60 years ago, been regarded by many as proof that fairies exist. FRED GETTINGS analyses the photographs – and argues that they cannot be genuine

ONE DAY IN JULY 1917, 16-year-old Elsie Wright borrowed her father's camera and took a picture of her 10-year-old cousin Frances Griffiths playing by the river close to their home in Cottingley, Yorkshire, England. They gave the film to Elsie's father to develop – and he was astonished to find that Frances's figure was surrounded by dancing fairies.

That, at least, is the beginning of the story of the remarkable Cottingley fairy photographs, five of them in all, that have caused so much excitement as proof of the existence of fairies (see page 381). But the truth is not so romantic. For no fairies were really photographed in Cottingley – the village was merely the site of a childish prank that grew into an enormous deception.

Above: an illustration by Claude Shepperson for Alfred Noyes's poem *A spell for a fairy*, which appeared in *Princess Mary's gift book*, published in 1915. The fairies bear a remarkable similarity to those of the famous Cottingley photographs – and it is known that Frances Griffiths, one of the two girls who allegedly photographed the fairies, possessed a copy of the book

The two young girls insisted that they had seen and photographed fairies, that much is certain. The pictures were striking enough – indeed remarkable, if they were genuine. Real fairies in a real wood, many people insisted.

It was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the famous creator of Sherlock Holmes, who introduced these fairy photographs to the world, describing them as 'the most astounding photographs ever published', and assuming that they were indeed pictures of *real* fairies. His article, published in the *Strand Magazine* of November 1920, was something of a bombshell, and one reader complained that for a few weeks 'no one talked of anything but fairies.' Conan Doyle's opinions were presented against the better judgement of many experienced psychical researchers, who realised that the evidence for the pictures' authenticity had not been sufficiently explored. Many researchers were, from the beginning, convinced that the pictures were far from genuine, and it was generally agreed among experts that the two girls who produced them had simply made copies of fairy drawings on stiff card or paper, had posed with these and photographed them. The only problem was that no drawing that could reasonably be supposed to be the original of the fairies that appeared in the girls' photographs had been found. At the same time, the girls themselves continued to insist that the fairies were genuine.

Not quite innocent?

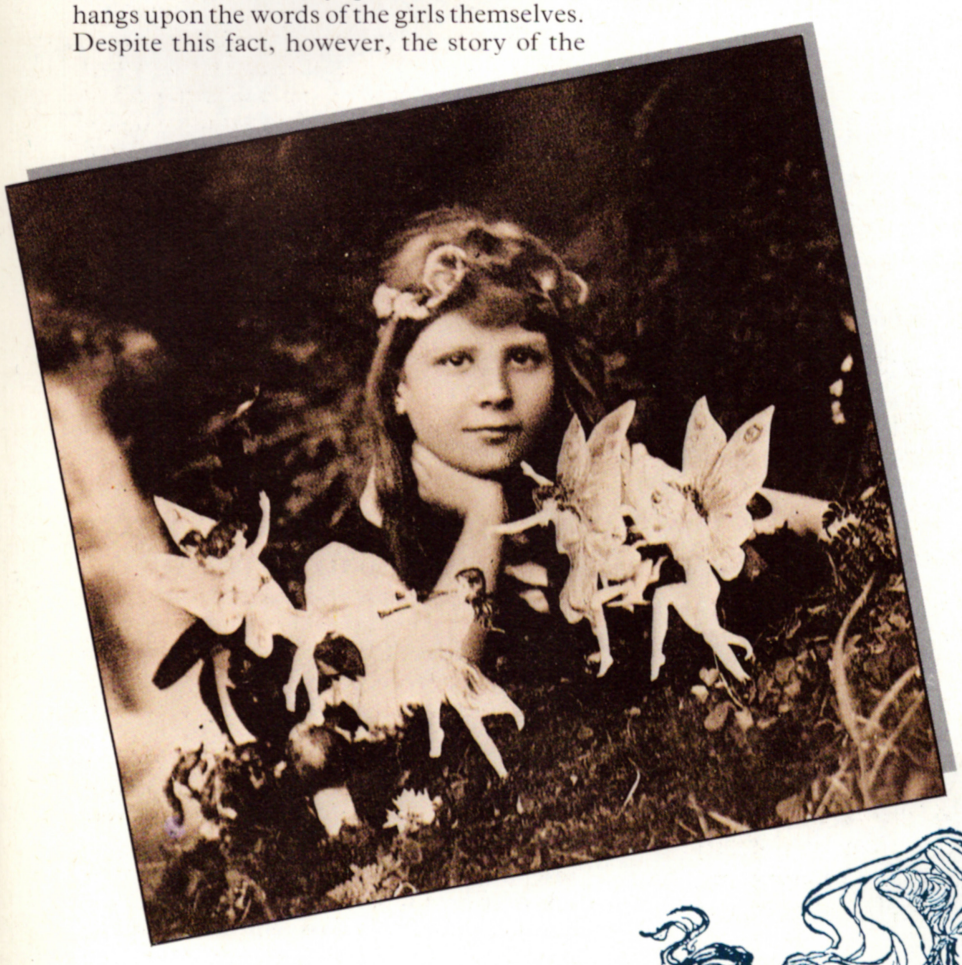
The fairies do indeed give the marked impression of being cut-outs. And Elsie was actually a proficient artist for her age, and was quite capable of making such drawings. She had also worked for a few months as an assistant in a photographer's shop in Bradford, and so it is clear that she was not quite the innocent young thing Conan Doyle had in mind when he published his sensational article.

In particular, Elsie's father suspected trickery. Elsie's mother, however, was herself interested in the Theosophy of Madame Blavatsky (see page 2061), and was therefore probably aware of the Theosophical teaching that held that thought forms could be materialised so that clairvoyants were able to percieve them. Certain members of the Theosophical Society had, in the previous decade, actually published reproductions of painted and drawn thought forms invisible to ordinary people – and these, alongside the ever-popular psychic photography (see page 1881), were sufficient to persuade many people that it was possible that the girls had indeed seen and photographed the fairies.

In the face of much cross-questioning, in the months after the publication of the photographs, and in later years during interviews given to newspaper and television reporters, Frances and Elsie insisted that the

pictures were not hoaxes – although some of the statements they made were curiously ambiguous. An interview conducted as late as 1975 found them insisting on their original story. However, there is certainly a double meaning in Elsie's statement, recorded in a BBC interview: 'I've told you that they're photographs of figments of our imagination and that's what I'm sticking to.'

The girls never took a photograph in the presence of a third party. A further series of picture-making experiments was conducted in the August of 1920 (see page 414), but again these were made by the two cousins, with no one else present. The whole validity of the series of fairy pictures, therefore, hangs upon the words of the girls themselves. Despite this fact, however, the story of the Cottingley fairies was only partly created by Elsie and Frances. It was much more the creation of the media.



Below: Frances Griffiths and a group of dancing fairies in the first of the Cottingley photographs. Comparison to a vignette illustration of *A spell for a fairy* (bottom) reveals similarities: the left-hand figures are almost identical, whereas the two right-hand figures have merely been transposed – and the large fairy wings clearly draw their inspiration from the colour illustration of the same poem that also appears in the book

Perhaps the two girls *did* indulge in making 'figments of the imagination'. Indeed, as we shall shortly see, there may now be no doubt that the fairies were faked. But their prank or joke turned into a sort of monster for them, and the snapping of that camera shutter in 1917 was for them rather like the opening of Pandora's box. Shortly an enormous weight of publicity was brought to bear upon these photographs, supported by the fluent pen of Conan Doyle – who in fact knew nothing at all about psychic photography, and had his own reasons for wanting to believe that fairies were real.

The truth is that, at the time at which Doyle was introduced to these pictures, he was already in the process of writing a book about fairies. Clearly, then, Doyle already had a strong interest in fairies, and he went on to make use of all the Cottingley pictures in his next publication, *The coming of the fairies*, from which he made a large amount of money. It must be remembered, too, that – as Leon Berger has pointed out in a letter to *The Unexplained* – Doyle had another, perhaps more compelling, reason for wishing to prove that the fairies were real. Doyle's father, who spent most of his life in mental asylums, saw fairies regularly – and Doyle may have felt that, by establishing the physical existence of fairies, he might at the same time be able to prove his father's sanity.

Whatever the reason, Doyle clearly had a vested interest in proclaiming the pictures genuine. It may well be that the girls had told little white lies to back up their initial fantasy – what children would not? – but it was Doyle who pushed these pictures into what became a public hoax. As a result of Doyle's publication, the two young girls found themselves entrenched in a position of dishonesty from which retreat was quite impossible.

The final proof

It was clear to many researchers that the pictures must be cut-outs. But the only real hope of *proving* this – in the face of what Elsie and Frances said – was to find the original pictures that the girls had copied. These were discovered in August 1977 by this author, who was then working on 19th-century fairy illustrations.

The drawings were illustrations for a poem by Alfred Noyes, *A spell for a fairy*, in which the poet instructs the reader how to make fairies visible. The charming illustrations were drawn by Claude Shepperson for *Princess Mary's gift book*, which was sold in vast numbers as part of a money-raising

scheme, the 'Work for women' fund, during the First World War.

The final vignette illustration to this poem is, without doubt, the original picture from which the fairies of the first Cottingley picture were constructed. The remarkable thing is that the girl who copied this (presumably Elsie, as she was the older and more artistically talented of the two) actually made no significant change to the individual figures of the fairies in the Shepperson drawing – they merely appear in the photograph in a different order. Elsie's drawing is clumsier, and she added butterfly wings to the figure.

An uncanny resemblance

Assuming the girls did indeed copy or trace the Shepperson vignette, they showed very little imagination. The one difference is that the Cottingley fairies have large wings, while those in the vignette have only diminutive wings. However, the wings in the colour plate that also accompanies the poem were evidently the model for the cut-out fairies. It is clear that the girls used the wings of the fairies of the colour plate in order to make their own creatures more fairylike. The wing structures in the colour plate and the vignette are quite different: in the plate the lower wings are sharply pointed, while in the vignette they are rounded. The lower wings of the Cottingley series are rounded, the upper ones more pointed – a further indication of the dependence of the Cottingley series on the Shepperson vignette.

There may be no doubt that the photographs were made in a spirit of fun, and were probably well-intended 'genial' forgeries. It was a childish lark that got out of hand. The resemblance between vignette and photograph is far too obvious for anyone to suppose that the girls intended serious deception. It was inevitable that someone would at a future time observe the marked similarity between the two, and realise that the photographs were not genuine. This, of course, makes the later insistence of Elsie and Frances on the truth of their story all the more difficult to understand. They were, in a sense, victims of the media, and especially of the influence of Conan Doyle who – albeit unwittingly – through his own personal interests turned a clever hoax into a life-long fraud. It is no wonder that, in a television interview in 1975, Elsie and Frances admitted that the photographs had caused them no end of trouble.

Sensational revelations from Elsie and Frances – see page 2338

Right: an illustration by Arthur Rackham for *A midsummer night's dream*, in an edition that appeared in 1908. Rackham was among those who, on the first appearance of the Cottingley photographs, suspected that the fairies might not be genuine. He believed, however, that they were derived from his own popular fairy drawings – whereas, in fact, they were direct copies of book illustrations by Claude Shepperson

Below: an illustration by Charles Altramont Doyle – Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's father – from the diary he kept while incarcerated in various lunatic asylums. Charles Doyle believed he saw fairies – and it may have been the desire to prove his father's sanity that prompted Sir Arthur's interest in fairies, and his championship of the Cottingley pictures

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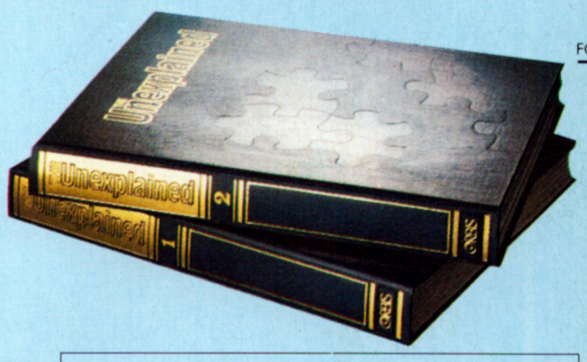

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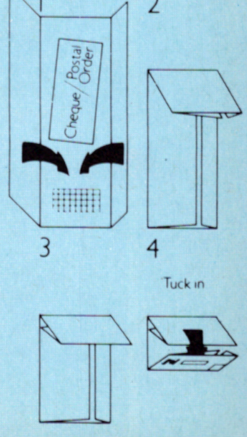

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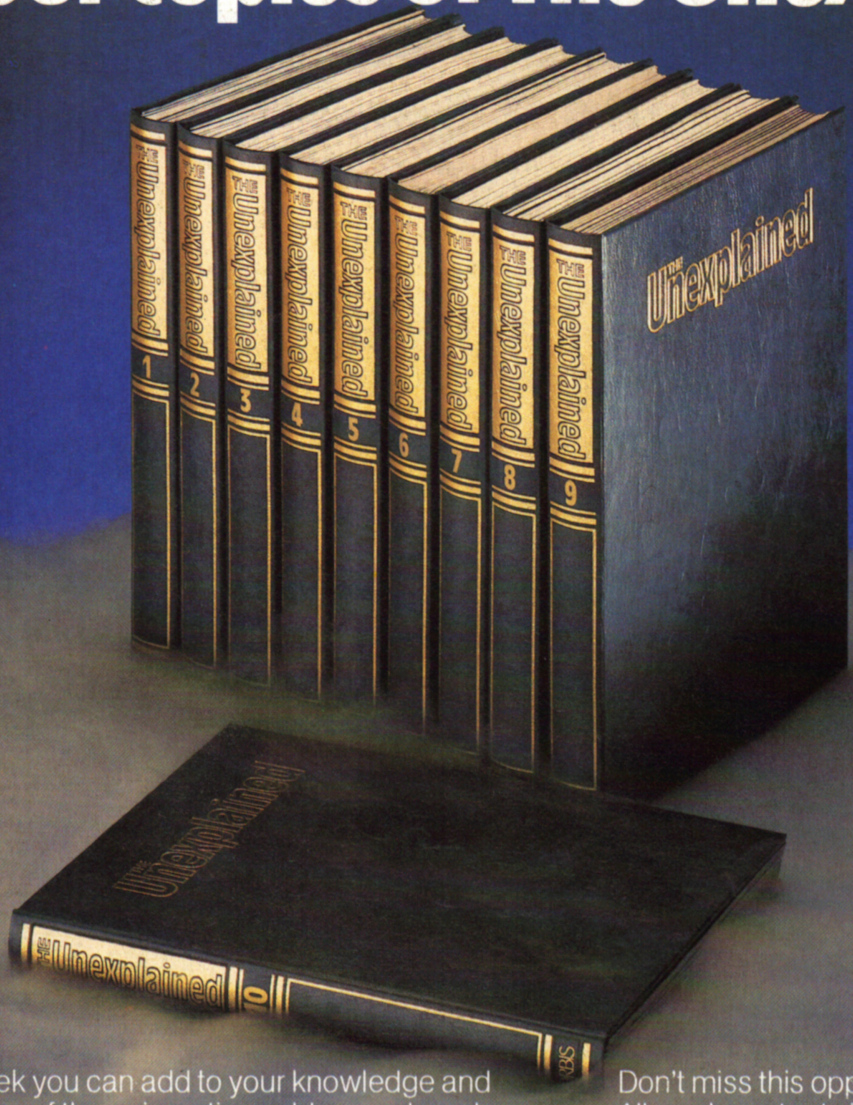

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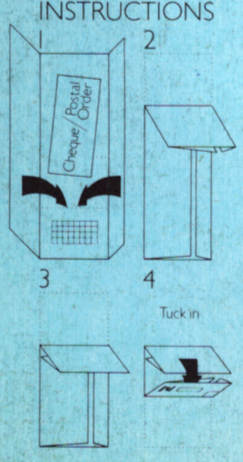

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